

CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A method for collecting and packaging of fresh cut produce comprising:

- 5 • machine harvesting a plurality of fresh produce,
- placing said plurality of fresh produce into a shelf stable processing stream,
- diverting a select portion of said plurality of fresh produce from said shelf stable processing stream,
- cutting said diverted select portion of said fresh produce and
- 10 • depositing said cut diverted select portion of said fresh produce into one or more containers.

2. The method according to claim 1 wherein said diverting further comprises;

- 15 • removing one or more undesirable sections from said diverted select portion of said fresh produce, and
- reintroducing at least some of said removed one or more undesirable sections or at least a portion of any juices generated by said removing of one or more undesirable sections into said shelf stable processing stream.

20 3. The method according to claim 1 wherein said plurality of fresh produce comprises tomatoes, bell peppers, apples, oranges, pears, peaches, apricots, beets, strawberries, plums, nectarines, melons, papayas, onions or guavas.

25 4. The method according to claim 1 wherein determination of which of said plurality of fresh produce is diverted is based at least in part on one or more visual characteristics.

30 5. The method according to claim 4 wherein said one or more visual characteristics includes color, ripeness, size, damage, defects, tenderness, juiciness or aesthetic appeal.

6. The method according to claim 2 wherein said one or more undesirable sections includes a top, an end, or juices removed from at least one member of said select portion of said plurality of fresh produce.

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7. The method according to claim 1 wherein said one or more containers includes one or more modified atmosphere packages.

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8. A method for collecting and packaging of fresh cut produce comprising the steps of:

- machine harvesting a plurality of fresh produce,
- placing said plurality of fresh produce into a shelf stable processing stream,
- diverting a select portion of said plurality of fresh produce based at least in part on one or more visual characteristics,

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- removing one or more undesirable sections from said diverted select portion of said fresh cut produce,
- reintroducing at least said removed undesirable sections into shelf stable processing stream,
- cutting said diverted select portion of said fresh produce, and

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- depositing said diverted select portion of said fresh cut produce into one or more containers.

9. The method according to claim 8 wherein said plurality of fresh produce comprises tomatoes.

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10. The method according to claim 8 wherein said one or more visual characteristics includes color, ripeness, size, damage, tenderness, defects, juiciness or aesthetic appeal.

11. The method according to claim 8 wherein said one or more undesirable sections includes at least a plurality of tops, ends or juices removed from said diverted select portion of said fresh produce.

5 12. The method according to claim 8 wherein said one or more packages includes one or more modified atmosphere packages.

10 13. The method according to claim 12 wherein said one or more modified atmosphere containers includes a transparent lid or a transparent bag.

15 14. A method for collecting and packaging of fresh cut tomatoes comprising:

- machine harvesting a plurality of fresh tomatoes,
- placing said plurality of fresh tomatoes into a shelf stable processing stream,
- diverting a select portion of said plurality of fresh tomatoes,
- cutting said diverted select portion of said fresh tomatoes, and
- depositing said cut diverted select portion of said fresh tomatoes into one or more modified atmosphere packages.

20 15. The method according to claim 14 wherein said diverting further comprises;

- removing one or more undesirable sections from said diverted select portion of said fresh tomatoes, and
- reintroducing at least said removed undesirable sections into said shelf stable processing stream.

16. The method according to claim 15 wherein said one or more undesirable sections comprises a plurality of tops, ends or juices removed from said diverted select portion of said fresh tomatoes.

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17. The method according to claim 14 wherein said one or more modified atmosphere packages incorporates a transparent lid or a transparent bag.

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18. The method according to claim 14 wherein said diverted select portion of said fresh tomatoes is diverted based at least in part on one or more visual characteristics of said plurality of fresh tomatoes.

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19. The method according to claim 18 wherein said one or more visually observable characteristics includes color, ripeness, tenderness, size, damage, defects, juiciness or aesthetic appeal.